

HARD-ROCK MUSIC CREATES KILLER MICE!

David Merrell, a high school student from Suffolk, Virginia, has won top honours in regional and state science fairs for his experiment involving mice, a maze, and hard-rock music.

After establishing a baseline of about 10 minutes for the mice to navigate the maze, David started playing music 10 hours a day, then put the mice through the maze three times a week for three weeks.

His findings: the control-group mice, which did not listen to any music, were able to cut five minutes off their time; the mice that listened to classical music cut 8½ minutes off their time; and the mice that listened to hard-rock music took 20 minutes longer to navigate the maze.

David said, "I had to cut my project short because all the hard-rock mice killed each other... None of the classical mice did that at all."

(Sources: *Washington Times*, 2 July 1997; reported in *Blazing Tattles*, Aug-Oct 1997)

EPA SCIENTISTS VOTE AGAINST FLUORIDATION

A copy of this letter, sent to the Citizens for Safe Drinking Water, San Diego, California, was recently faxed to us:

"I am pleased to report that our union,



Local 2050, National Federation of Federal Employees has voted to co-sponsor the California citizens' petition to prohibit fluoridation of which your organisation is the sponsor. Our union represents, and is compromised of, the scientists, lawyers, engineers and other professionals at the headquarters of the US Environmental Protection Agency here in Washington, DC...

"It is our hope that our co-sponsorship will have a beneficial effect on the health and welfare of all Californians by helping to keep their drinking water free of a chemical substance for which there is sub-

stantial evidence of adverse health effects and, contrary to public perception, virtually no evidence of significant benefits...

"Our members' review of the body of evidence over the last eleven years, including animal and human epidemiology studies, indicate a causal link between fluoride/fluoridation and cancer, genetic damage, neurological impairment and bone pathology. Of particular concern are recent epidemiological studies linking fluoride exposures to lower IQ in children.

"As professionals who are charged with assessing the safety of drinking water, we conclude that the health and welfare of the public is not served by the addition of this substance to the public water supply..."

(Source: Letter from J. William Hirzy, PhD, Senior Vice-President, National Federation of Federal Employees, to Jeff Green, Citizens for Safe Drinking Water, dated July 2, 1997)

SCIENTISTS AGREE: MARGARINE IS BAD FOR YOU!

Saturated fats aren't the only no-nos in a heart-healthy diet. A new study from Brandeis University, the University of Malaya and the Palm Oil Research Institute of Malaysia has found that substitute *trans*-fatty acids—made from partially hydrogenated unsaturated vegetable oils—are even worse.

Not only do *trans*-fatty acids, which are often found in margarine, raise levels of 'bad' LDL cholesterol in the blood, as do animal fats, they also lower levels of 'good' HDL cholesterol.

(Source: *Scientific American*, August 1997. See also our article, "Margarine, Fatty Acids and Your Health", in NEXUS 4/02.)

THE MOST CARCINOGENIC CHEMICAL EVER FOUND

Japanese scientists suspect that a chemical in the exhaust fumes of Diesel engines may be the most carcinogenic ever found, and the cause of a rise in urban lung cancers, according to a report in the October 1997 issue of *Environmental Science and Technology* (vol. 31, p. 2772).

The compound, 3-nitrobenzanthrone, had the highest-ever score on a standard test for cancer-causing potential of toxic chemicals.

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"I personally believe that the recent increase in the number of lung cancer patients in vehicle-congested areas is closely linked with respirable carcinogens such as 3-nitrobenzanthrone," said Hitomi Suzuki, a chemist at Kyoto University, who led the study.

When Suzuki tested the compound on a strain of salmonella he found that it caused more mutations than 1,8-dinitropyrene, the previously most powerful known mutagen.

Although both compounds are found only in minute quantities, they are so dangerous that "it is easily understandable that they would contribute considerably to the total mutagenic activity of Diesel exhaust particle extracts," Suzuki added.

He has called for stronger limits on the loads that Diesel trucks can carry because there are more emissions from engines under heavier loads.

(Source: *New Scientist*, 25 October 1997)

UK HOSPITAL TOLL OVERTAKES ROAD DEATHS

Hospital infections account for more deaths per year in the UK than road accidents or suicides. At any one time, 10 per cent of hospital in-patients are suffering from an infection contracted since they were admitted. These infections cause 5,000 deaths a year and contribute to a further 15,000.

The findings are released in a new book on Hospital Acquired Infections (HAI), published by the Office of Health Economics which studies the financial aspects of health care. The study finds the most common infections contracted from hospitals are in the urinary tract, the lower-respiratory tract and surgical wounds.

The report also says that up to a third of HAIs could be prevented.

(Source: *The Independent*, UK, 16 September 1997)

CANNABIS CURES BLINDNESS!

Sue Arnold, a respected journalist and writer for the *Observer* for 26 years, is registered as blind. A sufferer of retinitis pigmentosa, an hereditary eye condition, she recently discovered—by accident, at a dinner party in Battersea—that smoking cannabis brought back her sight.

Since that night, Sue has been spearheading a campaign to legalise cannabis for medicinal use in the UK.

(Source: *Evening Standard*, UK, 16 September 1997)

ELECTROMAGNETIC HOT-SPOTS MAKE CARS GO CRAZY

Many of Sydney's new cars have become vulnerable to various electromagnetic field "hot-spots", according to Phil Scott, Motoring Editor of the *Sydney Morning Herald*.

Symptoms include cars jamming on their own brakes, doors locking and gears shifting on their own, and engines shutting down completely.

The cars at most risk are a relatively small number of newer cars with inadequate "immunity" built into the electronic systems which control engines, brakes, transmissions and features such as central door-locking, cruise control and air conditioning. Airbags can also be affected.

Automotive failures are also well-known to RFI Industries, an independent testing laboratory in Melbourne. Dick Davies, manager of the company's electromagnetic compatibility and interference laboratories, says, "Of course the automotive world is closed-mouthed, like the medical world.

"We put these malfunctions into different classes. A fuel gauge that doesn't work when you're on the mobile phone is a 'grade one'. A 'grade two' might be the windshield wipers going off. Startling, yes, but unlikely to cause an accident.

"Grade three' could be the electric seat repositioning itself while you're driving. That could, perhaps, cause an accident. Then you go through to the 'grade fives', the catastrophic ones. You might be dri-

ving down the Hume Highway at 120 km/h and the microprocessor says 'stop the left front wheel'...or maybe the cruise control jams."

Needless to say, Australia is looking into standards on electronic immunity.

(Source: *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 13 October 1997)

UK GULF WAR VETS BLAME UNTESTED VACCINES

Armed Forces Minister John Reid, probing mysterious ailments suffered by British Gulf War veterans, said the troops were given vaccines that were not licensed in the UK. The soldiers, due to the threat of biological and chemical attack from Iraq, were given a mixture of anthrax and pertussis vaccines despite warnings from health department officials.

Reid told reporters: "I am committed to doing all I can to get rid of the distrust which has built up over the years between the Ministry of Defence and those who served their country in the Gulf."

Veterans campaigning for official recognition of "Gulf War syndrome" (GWS) believe their illnesses have resulted from a cocktail of chemicals they were given during the war. The symptoms include asthma, chronic fatigue, depression and skin ailments. About 51,000 British troops served in the war and up to 4,000 veterans and members of their families are ill.

(Source: *The Guardian Weekly*, w/e 9 November 1997)



WITHOUT INFORMED CONSENT

On 19 November 1996 something happened in Strasbourg, France, which could fundamentally remove many of the rights of patients. It had no public airing beforehand, and has been little reported on ever since.

After marathon discussions, the Committee of Ministers of 39 European Union member states adopted the Convention on Human Rights and Biomedicine. This allows for future drug use and other medical trials to be carried out on potentially huge numbers of people, possibly without their consent.

Those particularly at risk include the mentally ill, who are deemed not to be able to give their consent; those with diseases for which there is no "known" cure (i.e., AIDS, cancer, CJD); people who are in a coma; those needing emergency treatment; and, perhaps most worrying of all, children.

Although the convention applies only to EU member countries, the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) simultaneously, and very quietly, changed its rules to be almost identical to those of the Strasbourg Convention. These new rules also mean that some groups of people may be involved in medical research programs without their knowledge or consent.

Under the guise of individual "protection", the Convention says that in certain situations "general interests" will take priority over those of individuals. There is even the provision for organ removal from a living person, without consent, for trans-

plant purposes in "exceptional circumstances".

(Source: Doris Jones, *What Doctors Don't Tell You*, September 1997)

POLICE SPYING ON CITIZENS IS RAMPANT IN VICTORIA

Early October 1997 saw many Australians stunned to learn that even our fair country, the state of Victoria in particular, has its own secret police force. What shocked most people was the extent of surveillance on a wide range of society. Environmental groups, senior citizens' groups, community radio stations, journalists, nurses, women's groups, musicians, politicians, AIDS groups, church leaders and church groups—no one, it seems, has been exempt from ongoing scrutiny. Is this how we want our taxpayer dollars spent?

Equally shocking was that most politicians had no idea that this was going on, and those who did fully supported it!

In Victoria, the "secret police" is called the Protective Security Intelligence Group, and it has been infiltrating its members into the abovementioned organisations for years. One can only guess at the size of their accumulated wisdom by listening to the infighting and politics that are rampant inside all these community groups.

The undercover police at one community radio station, 3CR, were so diligent in turning up for their volunteer work that they became entrusted with organising fund-raising, deciding on programs to be broadcast, and even participating in the broad-

casting of programs they helped to make!

As more details came to light, many who found their names on "the list" decided to turn the tables and follow and monitor the movements of the Victorian "secret police". They are not amused!

(Sources: *The Sydney Morning Herald*, *The Age*, 6, 7, 8 October 1997)

POLICE ENTRAP UFO BUFFS!

The front page of the *Evening Argus*, from Sussex, England, proudly boasts how their own Crimebusters initiative has helped local police catch offenders.

Apparently the local bobbies set up a fake UFO sighting using four colour-filter halogen lights and then broadcast hoaxed messages over the police band of the CB radio.

Carloads of people turned up to the broadcasted location, only to be interrogated by the boys in blue—not the ones in grey, green or black! Two disappointed UFO-hunters had their scanning equipment confiscated for illegally using scanners to listen in to police messages.

Crime in Sussex must be at an all-time low for the local paper and police to devote such resources to catching two harmless UFO buffs.

(Source: *Evening Argus*, 12 September 1997)

FBI SPIED ON EX-BEATLE AND LIVELY PARROT!

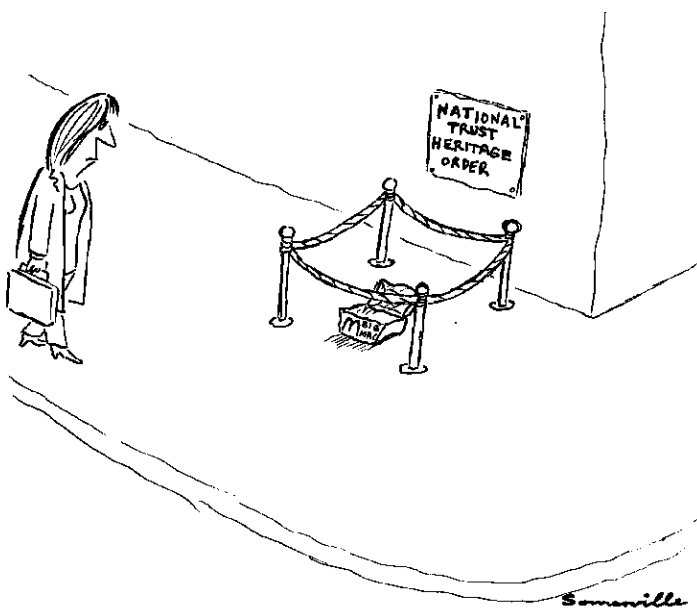
If you thought Victoria's secret police or the local bobbies in Sussex were keen, forget it. The ever-vigilant FBI has finally surrendered most of its files on John Lennon, revealing an investigation which ranged from reports on his contacts with anti-war protesters to the political leanings of a friend's parrot.

The files, which the FBI fought for 16 years to keep secret on the grounds of "national security", reveal agents zealously investigating the former Beatle, opponents of the Vietnam War and black militants.

"These documents show the FBI investigation was conducted in the manner of the shabbiest tabloid journalist," said Mr Mark Rosenbaum, a lawyer acting for Professor Jon Weiner who sued the FBI for the release of the files.

"They show the FBI had nothing better to do than record the utterances of a parrot and indulge in gossip and innuendo about rock musicians who happened to take political stances."

Under legal pressure, the FBI surren-



dered the 40 pages of documents and agreed to pay Professor Weiner, the author of a book on Lennon, US\$200,000 to cover his legal costs.

The documents contain many pages of trivial information, including a report in March 1972 that a woman named Linda had taught her parrot to interject with the words "Right On!" whenever a conversation became lively.

(Source: *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 27 September 1997)

MASONS ABUZZ OVER ELECTRONIC HANDSHAKES

The Freemasons' secret handshakes are about to go electronic. Finnish company Creativesco is patenting "the Kinsmen" (WO 97/24627) which silently alerts members of a secret society to each other's presence.

Transponders are disguised as pendants, watches or badges and emit an agreed code-word while searching for a match in the area. When a match is found, each device sends out an acknowledgement and alerts its owner by vibrating silently.

Transmission is low-power, so the alert only works over short distances. After the signal, fellow members can make visual contact with pre-arranged gestures and expressions. The same system could help strangers identify each other in crowds.

(Source: *New Scientist*, 27 September 1997)

MAD COW DISEASE JUMPS THE SPECIES BARRIER

According to some researchers, the new variant-CJD (Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease) is shaping up to be the plague to end all plagues.

Research studies published in *Nature* (vol. 389, 2 October 1997) reveal that the agent that causes bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE), or "mad cow disease", has jumped the species barrier.

Technically speaking, this agent is still undefined, but the scientific establishment, in its infinite wisdom, has decided that "prion" protein agents are most likely behind it all. In an attempt to establish that prions are indeed the new nasties, the Nobel Prize for Medicine was recently awarded to Dr Stanley Prusiner for his "discovery" of prions.

(Source: *New Scientist*, 4 October 1997. For more info, see our "mad cow" article this issue, plus our review of *Deadly Feasts*; or visit the web site, www.madcow.com)

SEEDS OF DESTRUCTION IN MONSANTO CONSPIRACY

Monsanto, that company that health and freedom activists love to hate, has embarked on one of the most extraordinary and ambitious corporate strategies ever launched. The story begins with a single chemical, glyphosate. Sold to farmers and gardeners as "Roundup", it is the world's biggest-selling herbicide, earning more than US\$2 billion last year alone. The company's patent on Roundup runs out in 2000, but, far from sowing corporate catastrophe, this event seems likely to enhance Monsanto's market value.

For the past 10 years it has cleverly been developing a range of new crops, genetically engineered to resist glyphosate. Spraying with Roundup does not harm these crops, but destroys all the weeds that compete. New patent legislation in Europe and the US allows Monsanto to secure exclusive rights to their production.

The first "Roundup-Ready" plant Monsanto released was a genetically engineered soybean. Between 50 and 60 per cent of processed foods contain soya, so the potential market is enormous.

Alarmed at possible increases in the use of herbicides, as well as the health effects of genetically engineered crops in general, environmentalists and consumer groups in Europe started calling for products containing the new beans to be clearly labelled. But in the US, Monsanto insisted that it would be impossible to keep Roundup-Ready soybeans apart from ordinary ones.

As the new beans were snapped up by growers in the US, Monsanto began an extraordinary round of acquisitions, buying shares in seed and biotechnology companies worth nearly US\$2 billion in the past 18 months alone. Among its purchases are companies which produce the famous "Flavr-savr" tomato, own the US patent on all genetic manipulations of cotton, and control around 35 per cent of the germplines of American maize.

Monsanto is now experimenting with new rice, maize, potato, sugarbeet, rape and cotton varieties. It has been suggested that within a few years all the major staple food crops will be genetically engineered. The new products are so attractive to many farmers that Monsanto has managed to get them to sign away their future rights to the seed they grow, and allow the company to inspect their fields whenever it wants.

Monsanto's new crops could not have become commercially viable without major legislative change. As members of the trade lobby Europabio, Monsanto and the other big biotech companies have mastered the legal climate in which they operate. Despite significant public opposition, in July Europabio managed to persuade the European Parliament to adopt a new directive, allowing companies to patent manipulated plants and animals.

Researchers and lawyers from Monsanto already occupy important posts in the US Food and Drug Administration which regulates the food industry. Only the New York Attorney-General's office has taken the company to task, forcing it to withdraw ads claiming that Roundup is biodegradable and environmentally friendly.

But Monsanto has been most successful when appealing to multilateral bodies. Last month, the World Trade Organization (WTO) confirmed its ruling that the European Union can no longer exclude meat and milk from cattle treated with Monsanto's bovine growth hormone, despite protests from farmers, retailers and consumers.

Biotech firms are now trying to persuade the WTO to forbid the labelling of genetically engineered foods. Any country whose retailers tell consumers what they are eating would be subject to punitive sanctions.

With astonishing rapidity, a handful of companies is coming to govern the global development, production, processing and marketing of our most fundamental commodity: food. The power and strategic control they are amassing will make the oil industry look like a corner shop.

More successfully than any other lobby, they are inhibiting the two remaining means of public restraint on their activities: government regulation and genuine consumer choice.

This may be the first and last chance we will get to tell the biotechnology companies what we think about their re-engineering—of both the stuff of life itself and the means by which it reaches us.

(Source: Reported by George Monbiot; published in *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 20 September 1997 and *The Guardian Weekly*, w/e 28 September 1997)